

Joy in Christ

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Date: 05 October 2025

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[0 : 00] Thank you, Ash, and thanks to Monica, Melissa, and Kath for our praise.! Well, do keep your Bible open at that passage, Philippians chapter 3, verse 1-11.

As we look at these verses together, I'm sure that most of us will have a CV, or if you're from North America, a resume, as well as the basic information about ourselves, our name, date of birth, and so on.

Our CV basically summarizes our qualifications, our skills, our achievements, our experience. In fact, anything that we think is relevant, especially if it is for the job that we want to apply for and get, because we want all of our accomplishments, all of our experience in life to be to our advantage. So we put our confidence in our background, our confidence is in our education, our confidence is in our abilities, because we think they should all count and help us towards getting what we want. And generally, they do help, because that's how life works, isn't it? You work hard, you achieve, and so you're rewarded. But what about when it comes to God?

[1 : 12] How does God accept us? How does God approve of us? Do we have to work hard? Do we have to be good? Do we have to put on a tremendous religious performance, do loads of good works, in order for God to accept us?

Is being accepted by God something we can earn by our own merit, like getting a job? It's yours because you deserve it because of all the stuff you've done.

Well, I wonder if you noticed in our Bible reading from Philippians chapter 3, that God doesn't accept us on the basis of what we've done, or because of the good, even religious life that we have lived.

And I wonder if that surprises some of us, that it's not your hard work, and it's not your effort, it's not being religious that gets you to God. No matter how impressive your religion is, no matter how tremendous your achievements are.

And that's what Paul says here in Philippians chapter 3, verses 1 to 11. Because what Paul does is he gives us his own CV, if you like. And you notice that it is chock full of all his accomplishments.

[2 : 31] But he says that none of it actually helps him when it comes to being accepted by God. Which is kind of the opposite of what people think, isn't it? Because whether you're religious or not, most people believe that it is your religious performance and it is your good works that count with God.

Basically, if you're a good person, then God will accept you. Right? I mean, isn't that his job? We do this, this, and this. He says, great job. You're in.

Come to heaven. But what we've read here in Philippians chapter 3 is that being accepted by God has actually got nothing to do with your performance. Because it's got everything instead to do with faith in Jesus Christ.

And it's illustrated in this man's life, the Apostle Paul. And what are probably the most personal words that Paul shares in any of his letters? Because he tells us about his past life and then his misplaced confidence in religion.

And then he tells us about his present life and his faith in Jesus. And so Philippians chapter 3, verse 1 to 11 shows us two things this afternoon.

[3 : 45] Two simple points. Religion is lost. And Christ is gained. Religion is lost, verse 1 to 6. And Christ is lost, verse 7 to 11. So Paul begins by warning the Philippians about false teaching.

Now, it's something that he feels very strong about. Just listen to his words in verse 1. Further, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord. It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you.

So he begins this section by warning the Philippians, those are the Christians in this place called Philippi, warning them against false teachers, false teaching.

And it's something he feels just so strongly about. So he reminds them to rejoice in the Lord. Well, why? Because if they listen to these false teachers, then they would lose their joy.

Who are these false teachers? Verse 2, he says, watch out for those dogs, those evildoers, those mutilators of the flesh. That's strong language, isn't it?

[4 : 50] Pretty strong, calling people dogs. And this is some of the strongest language that Paul uses in all of his letters because he's talking about people who basically think that they are speaking for God, but they're actually speaking against God because they're opposed to the good news of Jesus Christ.

And so this group that he's talking about are sometimes referred to as the Judaizers because their false teaching had this particular Jewish flavor to it.

And so what they did was they went around telling Gentile Christians, that's non-Jews, people like us, that to belong to God's people, what you have to do as well as have your faith in Jesus is that you've got to be circumcised.

And so that's the background to Paul's words here. And so these teachers were a danger to the church, and that's why he describes them in these three ways. He calls them dogs, first of all, because for Jews, Gentiles were referred to as dogs, regarded as being ritually unclean, but like animals were, and so not to be associated with.

But Paul speaks with irony here because he's saying it's actually these teachers who are the dogs because they've so twisted the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ that they have become just like unbelieving Gentiles.

[6 : 15] And then he calls them evildoers. So whilst they thought they were doing good by adding a nice bit of religion onto faith in Jesus, Paul says, no, you're doing evil.

And then he calls them mutilators of the flesh. And that's why, I mean, they were saying that circumcision had value. If you were circumcised, then you were more acceptable to God.

But Paul saying, no, it mutilates the flesh. It is unnecessary and just causes pain. And so by these false teachers saying all of this stuff, they were basically saying, faith in Jesus Christ is not enough for salvation.

They were saying, you've got to do something yourself in order for God to accept you, implying that Jesus isn't enough.

They're saying it's up to you. Put your confidence in what you do in order to be accepted by God.

And yet it's all wrong because it takes away the need for Jesus Christ if we can go to God ourselves and save ourselves.

[7 : 27] And so Paul says there in verse three, for it is we who are the circumcision, we who serve God by his spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus and who put no confidence in the flesh, even though I myself have reasons for such confidence.

As in contrast to the false teachers who insist upon this physical circumcision, Paul says, no, the true circumcision is not about putting your confidence in your religious practices, but about putting your confidence in Jesus Christ.

And so the real people of God, the real Israel, true believers are those who are not physically circumcised, but who serve God by his spirit, who boast in Jesus Christ as their savior, not themselves, and who put no confidence in their flesh or the stuff that they do.

So he's saying there, these people should not trust in their religious heritage or their religious performance or their religious practices to be acceptable to God because none of that stuff counts.

And that's when Paul then goes on to speak about his own impeccable religious pedigree and religious performance because that doesn't count either. It's what he says. Verse four, though I myself have reasons for such confidence, if someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more.

[8 : 56] Hear what Paul's saying there? He's saying, been there, done that, got the t-shirt. In fact, even better than getting the t-shirt, he's saying, I've got the physical marks in my body because I've been circumcised.

But he's saying, that doesn't count for anything. It's useless. And so he's saying, if anyone thinks they've got good reasons to put their confidence in their religious pedigree, in their religious performance, well, I've got more.

I'm the man. I can do better than anyone else. In fact, I have done better than anyone else. And he's got the evidence to prove it.

Basically, he says, you just need to check out my religious CV and you'll see everything listed on there about how good I am and how much I reckoned that I had done in order for God to accept me. And what he's doing by saying this is exposing the error of these false teachers. Not just by giving them a theological argument, but by saying, here's the experience of my life.

[10:01] Here's how wrong I was in thinking this is how I could get to God. And so what he does is he puts himself in the spotlight as the ultimate example of religious achievement, religious accomplishment, religious performance.

And not to boast about how good he is, but to prove that despite all of his amazing religious credentials, it does nothing for him. And you'll notice in these verses, just verse 5, 6, 7, he outlines basically his pedigree and then his performance.

So he says seven things that could give him or anyone reasons for confidence in being able to get to God. So just listen as I read his words, verse 5 and 6.

Circumcised on the eighth day of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews, in regard to the law, a Pharisee, as for zeal, persecuting the church, as for righteousness based on the law, faultless.

So that was Paul's life before he had encountered Jesus Christ. So what was he? Well, he says he was circumcised on the eighth day. So he was done the proper way, according to the Old Testament law.

[11:22] That was good timing. Secondly, he says he was born into the people of Israel. So he was a full-blooded Jew. Full-blooded Jew.

True descendant of God's chosen people from that race. More than that, he says he was of the tribe of Benjamin. So his family was from this tribe of Benjamin.

And from that tribe came Israel's first king, Saul. Paul, possibly why his parents gave him the name Saul before he became Paul. He says he was a Hebrew of Hebrews, so he was steeped in the culture and the language of his people.

He was a thoroughbred. That's his pedigree. But Paul can also shine the spotlight on his performance besides his pedigree because, five, he says he was a Pharisee, which meant he was from the strictest religious sect, the super-religious group.

Number six, he said he couldn't be outdone in zeal, so he tried his hardest out of his passion to get rid of the church, to stamp out the Christian movement. And then seven, he says his keeping of the law was faultless.

[12:33] Not that he obtained perfection or that he was sinless, but his life was one of scrupulous obedience to the law and all the Jewish rules and customs.

And so Paul was the real deal. He was the full package, the creme de la creme of the religious establishment. Full-on, fanatical, fundamentalist.

You could not top him. And his point in declaring all of this is to say none of this made me acceptable to God.

In fact, it was his basic problem because all of this stuff actually stopped him from getting to God. And so his CV wasn't worth the papyrus that it was written on.

Because when it came to God's salvation, all of this list of accomplishments and achievements could not get him to God. Now, of course, I don't think anyone here is thinking that you need to obey all Jewish laws in order to get to God.

[13:40] nobody thinks that these days. And yet, some people might be tempted to boast in other religious equivalents, like saying, well, I was baptized as a baby.

I was brought up in a Christian home. I always went along to Sunday school. In fact, I had perfect attendance. I kept the Ten Commandments as a kid and I do.

I go to church every Sunday. I am of the tribe of the Free Church of Scotland. I am a Presbyterian of Presbyterians. As for zeal, I'm a church elder.

As for my responsibilities, well, they are carried out with absolute perfection, not like all these other wasters and slackers. I am doing really well.

but even if you're not religious or wouldn't call yourself religious, then you may still be tempted to take pride in your good works or your good life, thinking, well, surely God has got to accept me.

[14:48] I mean, I might not be religious and I know I'm not perfect, but I am actually a good person. I mean, I don't steal. I don't lie, at least not about important stuff.

I'm not a murderer. I'm not a rapist or a pedophile. I actually care about justice and the environment. I put all my rubbish in the recycling bins for Glasgow City Council.

I even give to charity. Surely all of this counts for something with God. I mean, I do all this stuff other people don't. Surely I am more acceptable to him than they are.

And what Paul's saying here is, I've done far more. But none of it counts when it comes to being accepted by God. Our own righteousness, our self-righteousness is never enough.

In fact, what Paul is saying, our self-righteousness drives us even further away from God because we think it counts when it doesn't. Because we're placing our confidence in ourselves and what we've done in order to earn our acceptance with God.

[16:00] And he's saying that's not the way. So secondly, religion is loss, but Christ is gain. Verse 7 to 11. Notice what Paul says in verse 7 and 8. But whatever were gains to me, I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.

What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage that I may gain Christ.

So Paul just described his life before he met Jesus Christ. He built his whole performance, his whole religion on his performance, his pedigree. But what happened to him?

Well, he was converted. He met Jesus Christ. He became a Christian. And so he discovered that God doesn't accept you because of the good stuff that you do.

And he realized he needed Jesus Christ. And this realization enabled him to see that his religious pedigree performance counted for nothing. He used to think it was all gain and counted in his favor.

[17:07] And now he realized it was worth nothing and it was all loss. Just notice how he's using accounting language here.

He's speaking about profit and loss, isn't he? And it's like a spiritual accountancy. With a loss column and then a profit column. Where what had previously gone in his profit column, all the stuff he relays there in verse 5 and 6, all of his religion, he's saying, I used to think that was profit, but actually it needs to go in the loss column because it doesn't count for anything.

None of it provides any profit when it comes to salvation with God. And so he calculates its true worth in the light of Jesus Christ. Because before, Jesus Christ was in his loss column.

He didn't think he needed Jesus. Remember, this was a guy who tried to destroy the church. Well, now Jesus is in his profit column and only Jesus is in there.

He's the only entry. And so he's saying religion is loss, but Christ is gain. And so his whole life had been turned upside down. In fact, had been turned the right way up now that he had met Jesus Christ.

[18:26] Because for him, the only worthwhile thing worth living for now was no longer his religion, but it was Jesus. And he recognizes nothing can compare or compete with him.

And so to reinforce this point, Paul moves from his accounting spreadsheet in the office and he goes down to the rubbish dump. Because you notice that he describes his religious past as garbage.

And our translation puts it rather politely. Because the original Greek word is far stronger, far better. It's more like dung or excrement.

And that's what Paul says his religious CV is. It's disgusting compared to knowing Jesus as his Lord.

word. And so now instead of his religious observance being a qualification for being accepted by God, he's saying it actually disqualifies me. Because if you put your faith in that instead of in Jesus, it does nothing for you.

[19:34] It might count as profit, you think, but for God it counts as loss. And I think that's why religious people can be so resistant to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

They can hate it. It scandalizes them. Because if you've lived a lifetime of religious observance and you've tried your best to put on a good religious performance, and then you discover that can't put you right with God, that it doesn't count, you're devastated.

But Paul's saying not only is religion's net worth zero, it's far worse. He's saying that we all owe this massive debt to God, the debt of our sin, and we can't pay it.

And no amount of religious achievement, no amount of religious accomplishment will ever be enough to pay the debt of our sin to God. And he's saying only Jesus can pay the debt of our sin. It's not about what you do, it's about what Jesus Christ does. And Jesus alone can forgive all of our sin and make us acceptable to God. Because righteousness before God is never something that we can achieve.

[20 : 56] Righteousness with God is something we must always receive. Verse 9, Paul says, and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, that's a righteousness that's achieved, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.

That's righteousness that is received. So Paul says you just can't become righteous by obeying the law because you just can't do it no matter how hard you try.

In other words, it's not something that you can earn, acceptance with God. He's saying righteousness comes from God and it is by faith.

We receive it as a gift and so there's no chance of obtaining righteousness through your own efforts. We receive righteousness through Christ's effort because the grounds of our salvation, of our being acceptable to God is the merit of Jesus Christ.

So we're not putting our confidence in our credentials but in what Jesus Christ has done for us. If you know anything about the Christian message it is that Jesus lived the perfect life that you and I could never ever live and Jesus fully obeyed the law for us, the law of God that you and I could never ever obey and then Jesus died the death that we deserve to die for our failure to keep God's law and to obey God.

[22 : 35] And the good news is that when we put our faith in Jesus Christ an exchange takes place. So our unrighteousness is transferred to Jesus Christ and his righteousness is transferred to us.

It's that profit and loss switching accounts again. So Jesus' perfect record becomes ours when we put our faith in him and our poor unrighteous sinful record is taken by Jesus as he died on the cross.

And so Paul says there in verse 10 I want to know Christ yes to be known to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings becoming like him in his death and so somehow attaining to the resurrection from the dead.

So Paul knows Jesus Paul is satisfied by Jesus but he's not satisfied by how well he knows Jesus and he longs to know Jesus better because before he tried to get to God without Jesus now he realizes that Jesus is the only way he can get to God that his union with Christ involves being so identified with Jesus that the life of Jesus is mirrored in his own even becoming like him in his death by being obedient to Jesus to the end because Paul knows that dying is gain dying takes him to be with the Jesus that he is united to in this life and ultimately to enjoy resurrection from the dead and so Paul wants this resurrection power to transform his life right now to make him more like Jesus and he knows this life transformation won't happen through his own efforts he knows that human power and human effort which is basically what religion is cannot get you to God do you know that religion is basically humanity's attempt to try and get to God whereas the good news of Jesus is that God has come down to us in Jesus Christ to get us he's come in Jesus to save us because we can't do anything to save ourselves and so faith in Jesus is what gives us the life we need and it sees us through death and gives us hope for eternity and the good news of Christianity is that you can be sure about that right now every other religion says well if you work hard and you do good and you follow all these rules then maybe when it gets to the judgment you'll not have done enough and you'll get a pass and you'll get to heaven or salvation or however it's described only Christianity says no you can never do that but the good news is God has come in the form of Jesus Christ taking on human flesh as a man to live the life that we can never live and die the death that we deserve to die and so that's why

[25 : 59] Paul's life was basically stamped by the work of Jesus in his death and resurrection Paul's CV now had Jesus Christ layered on top the CV of Jesus Christ became Paul's own in fact where everything that Jesus had accomplished had been transferred to Paul credited to his account because his faith was in Jesus that's the righteousness that comes from God and of course this was not just good news for Paul this is good news for every single one of us whether we would call ourselves religious or irreligious because we too can receive righteousness not because we've lived a good life and then so God accepts us or nor should we think well I've lived such a bad life God

could never accept me because that's not what it's about we too receive righteousness making us acceptable to God by putting our faith in Jesus and so

Paul teaches and he backs up from his own experience that religion is loss but Christ is gain and so as we wrap things up is your faith in Jesus and what he has done through his death and his resurrection or are you putting your confidence confidence in yourself and what you can do to get right with God it's interesting God's way is completely counterintuitive to the way that normal life works but faith in Jesus is the only way of being accepted by God and you know what that means it means you're no more loved by God and you're no less loved by God according to your achievements or according to your performance that doesn't change his love for you so you can be the oldest and most mature Christian in this room or you can be the youngest and newest Christian here but through faith in Jesus you both have the same righteousness the same so you're no more righteous in Jesus Christ because you've been a Christian for 80 years than if you've been a Christian for eight days isn't that amazing because it's never about you and what you do it's about Jesus Christ and what he has done through his life and through his death for us so just as I close the question is are you staking your whole existence your whole eternity your life your death and whatever happens after are you staking that on Jesus Christ I hope so in 1662 there was a Scottish minister by the name of David Dixon and he was dying and so a close friend went to visit him just to see how he was and the 80 year old

David Dixon said this he said I have taken all my good deeds and all my bad deeds and have cast them together in a heap before I fled from both to Jesus Christ and in him I have sweet peace so we don't just flee from our bad deeds we flee from our good deeds too his religion is loss but Christ is gain you can never do enough to make yourself acceptable to God but the good news is you don't need to and I don't need to like Paul once you find Jesus you have all you need and you will know sweet peace in him